

A full-page background image showing Kim Kardashian in a bathroom, taking a mirror selfie. She is wearing a dark, strapless, form-fitting outfit. The text 'Butts and Balmain: Kim Kardashian and The Branded Body' is overlaid in large white serif font. The text is arranged in six lines: 'Butts and', 'Balmain:', 'Kim', 'Kardashian', 'and The', 'Branded', 'Body'.

Butts and Balmain: Kim Kardashian and The Branded Body

Illustration 8
(Kardashian, 2016)

In the 21st century, many celebrities are famous for their talents whether that be singing and entertaining the masses like superstar, Beyoncé or Academy Award winning acting performances like Angelina Jolie. Very few however are famous for their personalities and aesthetic with career and brand longevity like Kim Kardashian. After being thrust into shame by society at the release of her sex tape in 2007, her popularity has increased through the autonomous commodification of her body in order to create an international luxury brand. Through the method of advertising and reproduction of the body through the digital world, we have become engaged with her, but how far can this brand go?

Kim Kardashian is a brand. Her body, clothed or naked, is the space which the brand lives within and must be sustained in order to access the goals of money and attention. Over the progression of her career, from her status as a D-list celebrity to a A-list business-woman, Kim has designed her body, almost like Michelangelo sculpted David in the medium of marble, in order to become an icon in fashion and popular culture. Kathryn Woodward (1997) notes, "In the affluent West, there is a tendency for the body to be seen as a project which should be worked at and accomplished as part of an individual's self-identity." A part of this project, would be Kardashian's "butt" and the constant controversy on whether it is real or fake and improved through the method of plastic surgery and implants. In episode, 'The Former Mrs. Jenner' (2011) of *Keeping Up With The Kardashians*, the Kardashian family's reality television show, Kim proved that her posterior was just enlarged down to pilates and other physical exercises with the proof of an x-ray scan; however, it is noticeable in candid photos and throughout the seasons of *Keeping Up With The Kardashians* how the shape of her body especially her posterior changed from 2010 to the present day. In financial success and comfort, when feeling insecure about her facial skin around her eyes, she is also able to get botox in the episode, 'Botox and Cigarettes' (2010). Although on the show, we no longer see Kim improve her body through artificial avenues, her attitude towards plastic surgery is seen through her family environment in which her mother, Kris Jenner is obsessed with looking younger, has breast implants and had a facelift, her older sister, Kourtney Kardashian also has breast implants and her youngest step-sister Kylie Jenner has had lip enhancement injections in order for them to look more plump. Thus through a combination of self design and social status, she became a reference point for this decade's body trend of the hourglass figure and having the perfect "butt", in comparison to the 90s' body trend of the

very thin and waif figure, whose look is envisioned by a Kate Moss of that era.

Marcel Danesi (2006) states, "Brands are frequently sustained by lengthy advertising campaigns; these often consist of characters and recurrent themes, but they are usually reliant on linguistic devices such as straplines, slogans, and jingles." For Kim, her advertising campaign is *Keeping Up With The Kardashians*, in which she has the most successful career out of all of her family. Even in the earlier seasons opening titles, Kim poses in front of the whole family; she is the star, she is the reason they are in the media eye. Recurrent themes in the show include socialising, parties, work, whether that be a fashion shoot or a business meeting, romantic relationships and motherhood. We, the viewer, are entertained by watching their daily processes, the problems they have, the relationships they must maintain in order to fulfil in order to be more wealthy. For example, in episode 'Blame It on The Alcohol' (2010), we see Kim working in Las Vegas on her birthday, doing appearances and dinners. Her presence in this case is even a method of hybrid consumption for the Las Vegas nightclub as Bryman (2008) explains that "the more consumption items that are fused, the longer people will stay in the venue," meaning that her appearance and presence is valued as it is consumable. When there is product placement, it is the height of luxury fashion being mentioned like Gucci, Dior and Balmain which is just a marker of the status of Kim Kardashian.

In *Society of the Spectacle* by Guy Debord (1967), he explains that we, as a society are addicted to spectacles and in the world of celebrities, spectacles are the only way to stay relevant. Kim Kardashian is known as the "Queen of Selfies", a photo of self which she takes time to prepare for. They are meticulously calculated in approach and when they are revealed to the world. Although her individual fame grew from having her body commodified and shamed in her leaked sex tape with rapper, Ray J, in her selfies she reclaims her body, proudly, even becoming so open with the world as to post images which could be described as revealing, sexual and confident. One of her most controversial is a full body selfie in after she had her first child in 2014, North West, her positioning her body in a white bathing suit to show off the curves of her body shape. To the world, when woman is a mother she is supposed to be conservative, live for her children and be a sexual being in private. Debord explains, "The spectacle presents itself as something enormously positive, indisputable and inaccessible." To many women, the trend of the perfect "butt" is inaccessible as they are biologically incapable of attaining that shape and neither are they as wealthy

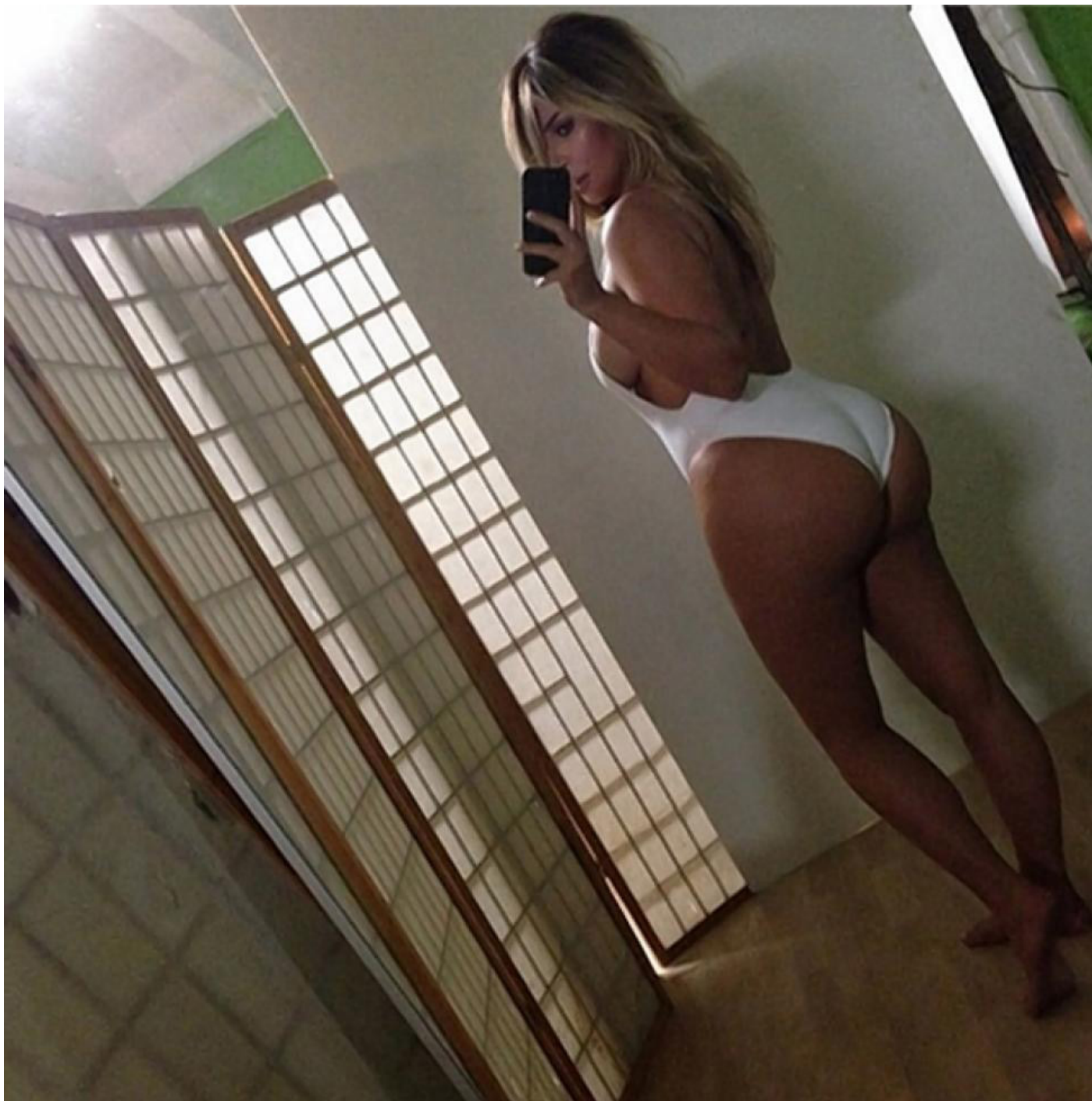


Illustration 9 - (Kardashian, 2013)

and famous as Kardashian so they must admire.

Luxury, in its essence, is about excess. Like Chanel creating their Haute Couture collections, exquisite detail and many elements go into one final product. In Kim's selfies, the elements are her make up, lighting, the scene or background behind her, the people she is surrounded by and the clothes she is wearing. In Kim Kardashian's (2015) photobook, *Selfish*, she collates and curates her best selfies from over 8 years of her life, 2006 to 2014. Selfies can be seen as art, expression and documentation through the medium of photography and Boris Groys (2008) agrees, "In his day, [Joseph] Beuys said that everyone had the right to see him- or herself as an artist. What was then understood as a right has now become an obligation." But what is her aim in posting these selfies on social media and publishing a book full of images her face and her body? Rachel Syme (2015) answers this question: "Selfie politics are attention politics: it is all about who gets to be seen, who gets to occupy the visual field." In the case of Kardashian, it is also "what gets to be seen," especially in her book *Selfish*, and the book itself is an example of autonomy and commodification. In the middle of her book, she breaks the flow of pouts and pre-photoshoot looks and leads the viewer into the more revealing and nude photos. As she photographs and holds her breasts in those photos, it is of love of her body parts and to her, she is sexual and revels in it. Fully nude and in control of her image in *Selfish*, means that in a world full of people trying to shame women for their naked bodies and wanting to share it with private audiences they are unable to. The only time Kim is not in control is during the natural process of pregnancy, which she only shows in one photo, and the rest throughout that period of her life in the book are above the neck. Her insecurity with her body during her first pregnancy can be contrasted with her increasing comfort with it during her second when she posted a naked selfie on the image based social media website, Instagram. Kardashian named her book *Selfish*, to many it may seem vain to collate over three hundred photos of yourself, pouting and looking your best or on your way to it but is it really selfish to love yourself? To be somewhat of a narcissist?

Now in the year of 2016, a product associated to Kim Kardashian's name is seen as one of interest and extravagant style. Danesi (2006) claims, "The manufacturer's name, in such cases, extends the social and psychological meanings of the product considerably, by associating it with the traditions of artistic authorship." Kimoji is an app where you are able to use Kardashian's image and associated linguistic phrases such as a "kimogif" of her hitting

her sister with a bag, Khloe in episode of *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*, 'Kardashian Civil War' (2008) or just a "kimoji" of her "butt" or her iconic face crying from episode 'Goodbye, New York' (2012) a spinoff of her family's show, *Kourtney and Kim Take New York*. That image in particular has been shared on social media so many times it has been removed from its original context, which was that Kardashian was upset at the deterioration of her marriage to second husband, Kris Humphries and instead is known as a image to represent an "ugly cry". The app works in the same way that emojis, emotive icons, do except for that they are illustrated images related to her brand unlike emojis sleekly fitting in with the text in messenger applications such as iMessage and WhatsApp. Since Kardashian is a social media enthusiast, using the people who follow her on those as her market for this product made it successful and according to TMZ (2015), on its first day of sale the App Store was receiving "9,000 downloads per millisecond." Kanye West (2016), her husband, even brags about how well the app does in his song 'Facts (Charlie Heat version)', "Kimoji just shut down the app store, ah/ And we made a million a minute." Kardashian also has a lifestyle app, Kim, for the fans and fashionistas to follow in order to know beauty tips including how to contour, style, things she is obsessed with, BTS, which stands for "Behind The Scenes" and Q+A with her. The most interesting aspect of the application is the Style section in which Kardashian recommends and links to the online stores of branded clothes and outfits that she has worn on her days out when the paparazzi have taken photos of her. Through this, her body becomes a branded space, to be clothed and become a walking advertisement for a designer. Kardashian's section is the same as other fashion magazines such as Vogue where the readers try to imitate a celebrity or "get their look" with suggestions for affordable items, but Kim shows you exactly what she wore, how much it costs. For some it may be too expensive, but with each purchase, fans may feel closer to Kardashian or being her. Kim. Kanye. Kimye, the collective name of Kim Kardashian and rapper and producer, Kanye West. Like Brangelina, Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt's collective name, they have become a power couple. The status of who Kardashian has a romantic relationship with is very important, all throughout her dating history, we, the viewer, see a pattern as majority of her partners are sportsmen, a person who is revered for their talents and seen as wealthy. When preparing for her marriage to second husband and basketball player, Kris Humphries in episode 'Kim's Fairytale Wedding: A Kardashian Event – Part 2' (2011) of *Keeping Up With The Kardashians*, Kris Humphries, Kim does not want to change her name to Kim Humphries for the wedding and

Illustration 10 - Chanel, 2015



Illustration 11 - (Kardashian, 2015)



get the look



get the look



AMERICAN APPAREL CATSUIT
\$42

Illustration 12 - Screen shots from Kim’s lifestyle application

Humphries feels emasculated by the fact and feels like they were not getting married. For Kim, her name is so strongly associated with her body, her brand, she possibly felt that it would confuse people, she did not truly love him or that it would affect business relationships. However, when marrying Kanye West, she becomes Kim Kardashian West, as a proud signifier that she is married to a wealthy, talented black artist, and rebrand. Her wedding, like the others in the past, was a spectacle, in a 16th century palace in Florence, Italy, in front of walls of white, blooming flowers. West proudly exclaims in Future (2014) song 'I Won', "You the number one trophy wife/ So it's only right to live the trophy life," and objectifies her, implying she must be showed off like the beautiful object she is, however Kardashian already objectifies herself as her business is her body. To West, Kardashian is a step on the ladder of status, her white, yet tanned skin combined with the "butt" typically seen on Black or Latin American woman is exotic and heralded. Kardashian takes the role of artist's muse in many of West's songs and West (2016) in 'Wolves' even goes as far to compare their relationship to Mary and Joseph, the parents of Jesus Christ, "I said baby what if you was clubbin'/ Thuggin', hustlin' before you met your husband?/ Then I said, "What if Mary was in the club/When she met Joseph around hella thugs?" Unlike the media and the general public who see her solely as too sexual, to West, Kim Kardashian is can both the Madonna and the whore, scales based on Sigmund Freud's theory; the whore because of her confidence in her sexuality and the Madonna because of her status as a wealthy white woman and her looks.

Beaudrillard (1988) explains that simulations are "a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real itself"; an example of this being Kim Kardashian's body, a simulation of a black woman's natural body. To the white gaze, a white woman who is racially ambiguous with black features such as wide hips and a big posterior is more palatable and attractive than a black woman with the same features because whiteness, internationally is seen as the peak of beauty. With black women's simulated features, comes the hyper sexuality of her body. Oliver Rousteing (2015), creative director of Balmain describes Kim as "pushing boundaries when it comes to the female form. I love dressing her, she's a different body type to the models on my catwalk," but one must question, whose boundaries is she pushing when black women typically have that body shape naturally? Kardashian's Paper Magazine cover in 2014 was titled "Break The Internet" and instead of breaking it, it was seen as controversial. On the cover itself, Kim is dressed glamorously, popping open a bottle of champagne and balancing a glass on her derrière. The photographer, Jean Paul

Goude, most known for photographing musician Grace Jones, refreshed an idea from image, "Carolina Beaumont" which he took in 1976 in which a nude black young woman poses and smiles, hair pointing towards the ceiling, posterior outwards and the photographic language is primitive, not progressive. Reminiscent of Saartjie Baartman, a black woman who travelled as part of a human zoo exhibit in the 19th century, Kardashian's features are gawked at, but seen as artistic enough to put on a magazine cover and like "the real itself" her features, in particular her posterior is fetishised without the black skin.

Like her body, black culture in America is commodity and available to everyone. The proprietors of this culture created a language that once became popular to the rest of America and even the world, is no longer theirs. It is seen uncool to be a type of black person - the lower class who speaks in slang, wearing fake designer clothes and living in poor housing conditions however, the culture which comes from it is seen as interesting to non-black people. Kardashian being married to a black man who's very profession lies in black culture, has become comfortable around it and even appropriates black culture in her Kimojis. Words such as "sus", "fleek", "thot", "shade", "turnt" and even a kimogif of her dabbing - a dance move most made popular by the rapper Future. She even goes as far to appropriate gay culture using "slay" and "Yass bitch yaasss" which have made their way into popular culture through social media. If Kimojis are supposed to be a reflection of Kardashian, she makes you question how far divorced are these words from their meaning and if these are really things that she has said or done, or whether they were added to her app to add saleability and to be universal in attraction to all her fans. She profits off of black cool and culture, even though to her the language originally is unavailable and seen as below her status as an upper class white woman.

Now even still people will say "What is Kim Kardashian exactly famous for, aside from her sex tape?" without realising that through self design and advertising, her body has become a vessel for high, luxury fashion. When people think about her, they think of her body, the ideal of this fashion era, curvaceous yet slender. Presenting her body as the simulation of a black woman's body, she achieves hyper sexualisation without the degradation or oppression that comes with it. Her continuous advertising campaigns, Keeping Up With The Kardashians and their spin offs and now, lifestyle application, Kim, in which you get even more of an insight into her life, makes it seem achievable, even though it is only available to the few born into



Illustration 13 - E! News, 2014

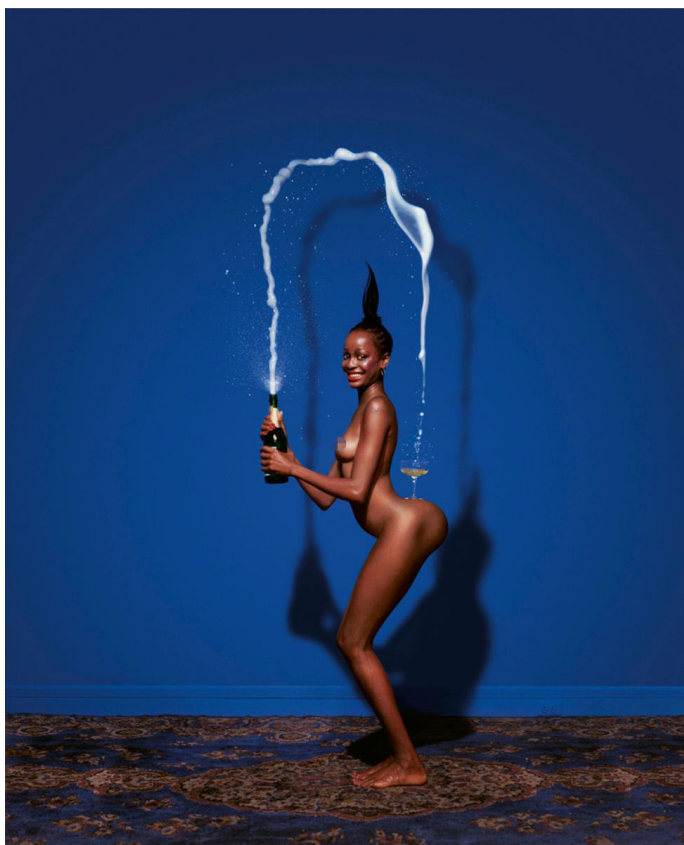


Illustration 14 -



Illustration 15- (Goude, JP, 2014)

wealth. Kardashian offers cheaper alternatives in the application and Kimojis in order for you to have a conversation using her body language. Selling her embarrassment and moments which would otherwise be seen as regretful to most people, she excels in commodifying her life. Kim Kardashian makes sure that if you're laughing at her, she and her wealth are laughing too.

Interview w/ Haley Potiker

Haley Potiker is author of Vice article titled 'Kim Kardashian's Mobile Game Ruined My Life'. I interviewed her over email about her interactions with Kim Kardashian.

Is Kim a feminist icon?

I certainly think so, but I also hear the argument that she's post-feminist. I don't think that's fair. I appreciate the way she uses her spotlight to make everyone around her money. Her openness about the work that goes into looking the way she does deconstructs the "flawless" myth and shines light on what was once an invisible beauty process.

The ability to improve your body is a privilege and luxury which only some can afford. Has Kim's body in any way, in your opinion, changed her class status?

I'm not sure I understand this question... I think it's unfair that we champion Kim as bringing big butts "back" in style or whatever, because WOC have always had big butts and men have always admired them. But the fact that her body shape has caught the eye of many top fashion houses is in my opinion pretty revolutionary.

Do you think that Kim is now a walking advertisement for designers?

Yes, but it came after a long road of being an outsider to fashion houses. I think Kim and her sisters are now muses for top designers, certainly. She also uses her lifestyle app and social channels to endorse beauty products, including her own line and those of her friends, like hair stylist Jen Atkin's new product line, Ouai. The idea to me is to maintain fashion icon status as a platform to sell products and make money.

Have you used any of her apps or merchandise (ie Kimojis)? If so, what part of it attracted you? (Was it the social aspect, Kim's own brand etc)? What did you learn about her brand?

lol, have you seen my article about this? <http://www.vice.com/read/kim-kardashians-mobile-game-ruined-my-life-021>

I have Kim's lifestyle app and I use Kimoji's. I also bought her book Selfish. Kim knows that people

love looking at photos of her, and she's able to commodify that. Fans send Kim's crying face expression to each other as a response already! converting that into an emoji format is genius.

Lastly, can you describe Kim in one sentence?

Kim Kardashian is a revolutionary entrepreneur.

Kim's been called the Queen of Selfies. What do you think makes her selfies so interesting?

As for Kim being the queen of selfies... have you seen her twitter today? she went off on some haters and posted a second naked pic. girl is slaying.

I'm not sure what makes her selfies so interesting to her fans. I guess the thing that makes selfies interesting in general is that they are taken by the subject herself, so that the photos turn out exactly how she wants them to. There's something to be said about selfies as a revolutionary act, since they take the middleman (or cameraman) out of the equation. They say a lot about self-presentation, self-esteem, self-love, whatever.

Kim's selfies are interesting to me because she owns them all the way back to 2007, when her eye makeup and outfits were just straight up embarrassing. I love that she embraces all the old iterations of herself.

and the book Selfish was just a genius move, she knows people look at her selfies all day, so why not compile them and make some money?

Illustration List

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Illustration 2 - Joseph, C. (2016) *Inside Iceland*. [Photograph] Elephant and Castle, London.

Illustration 3 - Joseph, C. (2016) *Inside Iceland*. [Photograph] Elephant and Castle, London.

Illustration 4 - Joseph, C (2016) *Shopping Bags in Westfield*. [Photograph] Shepherd's Bush, London

Illustration 5 - Joseph C. (2016) *Inside the Disney Store* [photograph] Shepherd's Bush, London

Illustration 6 - Joseph, C (2016) *Panoramic view of the Village*. [photograph] Shepherd's Bush, London.

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